

The Purchase Society: Adaptation to Economic Frontiers.

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Abstract:

A sociocultural category, termed the Purchase Society, is proposed as a framework within which to analyze adaptations by simpler societies living on the economic frontiers of both agrarian and industrializing states. Unlike peasantry, purchase societies maintain their political autonomy and are not enmeshed in the political controls characteristic of agrarian states. Consequently, their involvement with a wider society is characterized not by coercive demands for payment of various rents to the state, but solely by engagement in trade or wage labor to obtain items of foreign manufacture which have become cultural necessities. In order to participate successfully in this wider economic network, internal socio-political and economic structures may adapt in any number of ways so as to facilitate the formation of outside economic ties.

Keywords: economics | anthropology | purchase society | agrarian states | industrializing states | politics

Article:

Much, though by no means all, of the study of culture contact and change has been concerned with the impact of states on less complexly organized societies.' As the influence of state organizations has extended both directly and indirectly over ever greater territories, some simpler societies have been hopelessly fragmented by the ensuing change, eventually to become extinct. Other cultures, however, have made more satisfactory adjustments to the presence of states, responses which frequently have resulted in the formation of new socio-cultural orders organized so as to take account of the state's presence. These responses have followed many paths and taken a variety of forms.

Part of the complexity results from the fact that there are various types of simpler societies as well as of states. In addition, contacts between states and nonstate societies are invariably multidimensional, including social, political, economic and ideological aspects. Although there is

now a considerable literature on each of these aspects of culture contact and change, relatively little attention has been given to the recognition of new socio-cultural patterns in their entirety. It is the purpose of this paper to suggest one such social category, here termed the Purchase Society (cf. Helms 1969b), which has not been adequately recognized previously, but which appears to be a frequent form of response to the impact of states.

Traditionally, anthropologists have usually reviewed the material under discussion within the frameworks either of peasant or of acculturation studies. It is our contention, however, that limitations are being placed on some sets of data by viewing them within either or both of these theoretical contexts. Acculturation studies can be said to have centered primarily on the analysis of processes of change involving previously recognized socio-cultural categories, rather than being much concerned with the recognition of possible new patterns of organization, although this aspect is not entirely neglected (cf. Spicer 1961: Chap. 8; Steward 1955:55-56). This situation contains the hidden danger that material which in reality represents a new category may be placed more or less automatically into already existing frameworks in the process of analysis.

Eleanor Leacock appears to have this possibility of distortion in mind in her discussion of the effects of involvement with the fur trade on the Montagnais of eastern Canada. "Their apparent 'primitivity' is deceptive" she notes in her conclusions, going on to emphasize that contemporary Montagnais are not simply representative of an indigenous culture with a veneer of European traits, but that "fundamental socioeconomic changes have been taking place in some parts of their area for over 300 years. . ." (1954:43; my emphasis). It is the structure and function of the new pattern resulting from these fundamental changes which often seem to fall outside the focus of acculturation studies although characteristics of processes leading to them may be recognized (e.g. Kroeber 1948:section 179).

The major socio-cultural category into which contacted societies such as the Montagnais are often placed is peasantry. However, these societies may not always be covered adequately by peasant studies, either. The term peasantry traditionally has been used in a somewhat restricted sense to refer to largely self-sufficient rural agriculturalists tied to the institutional network of an agrarian state (cf. Foster 1967:4-6). Yet there appear to be a number of simpler societies involved with states which do not fall readily under the peasant label for a variety of reasons. Some are excluded by virtue of not being agricultural, while others may be questioned because they are tied to nonagrarian states.²

Furthermore, the differentiation and relative importance of the types of ties by which simpler societies may be involved with states regardless of the nature of the subsistence base may prove to be significant for purposes of classification (cf. Wolf 1966: 3-4). Frederick Lehman's conclusions regarding the nature of Chin society are pertinent here. This Southeast Asian culture, he feels, does not readily fit the standard peasant category primarily because the Chin, until very recently, have not been involved

in the political network of the neighboring Burman state, and do not follow a "little tradition" based on the Burman "great tradition." Instead, Lehman suggests that the Chin have developed an adaptation of a different nature to Burmese contact. This adjustment has taken the form of "a fundamental economic adaptation to a civilization without inclusion in that civilization's institutional network and without permanent, formal structure to its interaction with the Burman population. This is a limiting case between peasantry and tribal society" (1963:223).

The definitive points made by both Lehman and Leacock are applicable to the Miskito of eastern Nicaragua and Honduras, who have been successfully involved in trade and wage labor with states of the Western world more or less continuously for over 300 years (Helms 1967; 1969a). As with the Montagnais, the social, economic and political adaptations made by the Miskito to the demands of this interaction have been so far-reaching that it would be misrepresentative to view Miskito culture in any way as simply "contacted native." Yet, on the other hand, the eastern regions of Nicaragua and Honduras are not part of the effective national territory of these states and the Miskito, like the Chin, are not involved with national institutions to any significant extent. Hence, it seems equally misleading to consider them peasants. Rather, the Miskito, the Chin, the Montagnais and a number of other societies seem to be representative of a different type of adaptation to state influence.

In the following pages an attempt is made to examine this response more closely in the hope of providing a few guidelines which may prove useful for future investigations. Using selected ethnographic examples, it will be argued that there is a heretofore neglected socio-cultural category containing groups which have formed distinctive, stable adjustments to what might be termed economic frontiers in a manner significantly unique to warrant separate consideration. Our major purpose is not to provide complete coverage either of all societies which might seem to fit the proposed category, or of all its designating characteristics, but simply to illustrate the need and validity of such a classification in the hope that further interest might be stimulated.

The crucial difference between peasant and purchase societies lies in the nature of their respective ties to the states with which they are involved. Peasantry came into being with the evolution of agrarian states and all aspects of peasant life must somehow take account of the state's superior political organization. By virtue of the demands of this political network, the peasant household must be geared to provide labor, produce or money demanded by the state for the support of its elite. Consequently, distinctive social forms develop to provide links between peasants and those in power (e.g. patron-client relations), or, conversely, to limit contact with the state as much as possible (closed corporate communities). These and other adaptations reflect the peasants' need to channel activities around the overriding, all-pervasive, rather one-sided power of the state, and thus provide the distinctive characteristics of peasant society (cf. Wolf 1966; Potter et al 1967).

Purchase societies, in contrast, are tied to the state not by compelling, asymmetrical political holds, but by the balance of commercial activities. Members of purchase societies appear as rural

participants within a wider economic network formed either by industrializing nations searching for raw materials for their growing industries, or by trade with agrarian states. Geographically, purchase societies can be found on economic frontiers of states, in territory that is beyond de facto state political control (although often falling within the official de jure boundaries claimed by the state), but lying within economic reach of state activities. From the point of view of the local society, the over-riding factor, the channel that directs and influences all other activities, is the need, small at first but constantly growing, for items of foreign manufacture. These goods quickly become cultural necessities, either because traditional crafts are forgotten, or because they become necessary for the psychological wellbeing of the group.

To obtain these necessities a variety of adaptations may develop. Traditional subsistence activities are altered in a number of ways to allow for wage labor contracts, or the exchange of natural resources and/or agricultural produce for desired foreign goods, perhaps at trading posts or through regional middlemen. In order to promote commercial activities social relations may be re-structured to provide the necessary links and independence required for successful trade relations, and new forms of socio-political organization may arise to effect the same goals. In brief, the demands of participation in a wider economy become primary, and all other aspects of behavior adjust accordingly. We should emphasize at this point that we do not mean to imply that peasants do not also engage in what may be extensive trade networks. Rather, we are suggesting that peasants have a prior obligation, that of supplying rents to the state, which members of purchase societies effectively avoid by maintaining a high degree of local political autonomy. In so doing purchase societies may be expected to develop adaptations of a different order than those of peasantry to the wider society of which they are a part.

Purchase Societies and Industrializing States

Perhaps the clearest examples of purchase societies may be found in relation to industrializing states. Thus, the economic frontiers of the Western world may be expected to provide relevant ethnographic data. We will turn to two such areas for illustrative materials: portions of northern Canada and Alaska on the one hand, and Amazonia and the Caribbean coast of Central America on the other. Characteristic features of two purchase societies from these regions have been described previously by Murphy and Steward in their paper comparing the Mundurucfi of Brazil with the Montagnais of eastern Canada (1956). In addition we will utilize data recorded in village studies of the Snowdrift Chipewyan of western Canada (Van-Stone 1965), of the Eskimo of Point Hope in western Alaska (VanStone 1962), and of the Miskito of eastern Nicaragua (Helms 1967). The discussion of necessity will remain somewhat general and the adaptations considered by no means are meant to exhaust the number of possible adaptive paths which are open to purchase societies.

It may be well to emphasize again that it is the nature of the economic frontier with which they interact, together with the effective maintenance of political autonomy, which marks these peoples as representative of purchase societies in relation with industrial states, rather than the

existence of de jure state political claims to the territories they inhabit. For example, the Miskito, while located geographically within the formal political boundaries of Nicaragua and Honduras (states which do not easily qualify as industrial), were involved commercially for centuries not with these states but with the more fully industrial nations of England and the United States. It is this commercial involvement and its effects that have produced a purchase society among the Miskito, rather than their territorial location within Nicaraguan and Honduran boundaries. Similarly, the Munduruci, while technically resident within the territory of Brazil, were tied commercially, either directly or indirectly, with the industrial world for at least half of their period of existence as a purchase society.

In all the societies under consideration, adaptations to the demands of foreign commerce required certain adjustments in the traditional culture pattern. First and foremost, new economic patterns developed, characterized by a balance between requirements of the subsistence economy and the demands of a cash or barter economy. To achieve this balance, traditional subsistence activities of necessity were altered to greater or lesser extent in order to make room either for new types of work, or for the expansion and adaptation of traditional activities for commercial purposes. With respect to the first alternative, opportunities may arise for wage labor (e.g. among the Point Hope Eskimo and the Miskito). Concerning the second, expansion and adaptation of traditional activities may see the barter of hitherto little used natural resources (the trapping of small, fur-bearing animals by Point Hoppers, the Montagnais and the Chipewyan of Great Slave Lake), a new crop added to the traditional list of cultigens (rice and beans among the Miskito), or added emphasis given to a traditionally utilized plant for commercial gain (increase in mavioc production by the Munduruci, in banana production by the Miskito). Any single culture may utilize one or more of these adaptive techniques for purposes of commercial exchange.

Within each society the dual economy developed by balancing aspects of traditional subsistence with new commercial ventures operates by dovetailing the two economies in any one of several ways. Among the Point Hope Eskimo, employment in Fairbanks, Anchorage or other Alaskan cities, or at various military sites takes place in the summer months, the only time that climatic conditions permit construction and related activities where jobs are available. This is an ideal situation from the Eskimo standpoint since summer is traditionally the slow time of year in the subsistence cycle. Thus traditional activities and wage labor can be successfully combined into a single annual cycle (VanStone 1962:60-61). Somewhat the same pattern is found among the Snowdrift Chipewyan where summer and fall are times for hunting and fishing, respectively, with perhaps limited wage labor opportunities, while winter and spring activities center primarily around trapping (VanStone 1965: 12-32; cf. Murphy 1960:43).

Dovetailing of a different sort occurs among the Miskito where male-female division of labor rather than the time of year provides the fit. Women traditionally were responsible for the sedentary job of tending to subsistence agriculture while men roamed more freely as hunters and fishermen. With the advent of the commercial world, men easily added collecting of forest

resources, mine labor, rubber tapping, lumber cutting to their pursuits, while women continued to handle most of the work of subsistence cultivation (Helms 1967: Chap. 9).

Still a third type of coordination can be found in the familiar boom-and-bust economic cycles produced by rapid fluctuations on the world market for the raw materials or crops produced by the frontier. For purchase societies, the success of this type of cycle for dovetailing traditional subsistence activities with commercial dealings probably depends on the frequency of the cycles. The wealth made possible by sustained boom encourages increasing dependence on commercial products with the growing possibility that more and more traditional techniques will go unused and thus be forgotten. Rapid fluctuation, or in other words repeated "busts," forces a return to traditional practices often enough so that the necessary skills are maintained even if they have been somewhat neglected during the boom years.

Examples of these conditions are found among the Point Hope Eskimo, the Miskito and Amazon basin groups such as the Mundurucú. Since the basic operations of boom-and-bust cycles are generally familiar, let us forego detailed descriptions of the specific situations found among these groups and turn instead to a brief consideration of credit systems, which are widespread in the regions under discussion. In the general literature credit systems are often pictured as harshly controlling and exploitative, and thus would seemingly thrust purchase societies into a coercive system analogous to the state's control of peasantry. The "classic case" which generally comes to mind in the economic frontiers with which we are concerned is that which occurred at the height of the rubber trade in the Amazon basin, where traders often held absolute control over the lives of those within their domains, and where brute force was used if necessary to keep collectors at work. However, it is possible that this may prove to have been an extreme case. On the other side of the ledger it is possible to find examples of harried traders trying to cope with the inconsistent demands of their native clients or helpless to collect back debts, or of employers constantly threatened to be victimized by the natives' tendency to work only long enough to earn what they need for immediate use.

It is also possible that what Western observers see as "exploitation" is considered "desirable" from the point of view of the native population. For instance, VanStone reports that the Snowdrift Chipewyan do not consider a Hudson's Bay Company manager "good" unless he extends credit. "He is thus judged by the extent to which credit can be wheedled out of him." "Often the relationship between the Indians and the Company manager might almost be characterized as involving a battle of wits, since the goal of the Indians at all times is to obtain credit often by fair means or foul" (1965:23, 24). In brief, it is suggested that, at least with respect to these economic frontier regions, the general impression of credit systems as being unfair and undesirable to the native by definition may be an overstatement. On balance the system as a whole probably is more severe than anything found in the pre-contact world, a situation due in part also to the lack of predictable behavior from one trader to another. Yet in general it also appears to allow for considerable maneuvering on the part of the local population. In contrast, demands of landlords and state officials are less easily avoided by peasants since

these liens on their production are legitimately backed by the power structure of the state with little, if any, tolerance for successful maneuvering.

The socio-political adjustments made by our case societies to meet the demands of the commercial world show considerable diversity. Yet the adjustments illustrated can readily be placed into a spectrum of adaptations ranging from fairly simple, i.e. relatively little change, comparatively speaking, from the traditional pattern, to increasingly complex in terms of the amount of reorganization required to meet new conditions.

At one end of the continuum the Point Hope Eskimos have balanced the cooperative efforts required by hunting on the one hand and the individuality inherent in trapping and wage labor on the other without drastic social reorganization. In certain sectors changes have occurred: the traditional extended family was replaced by the nuclear family at least by the turn of the twentieth century when feuds and family rivalries declined. However, economic and social activities still focus on the family as a unit, and, furthermore, community solidarity remains strong (VanStone 1960: 182; 1962: 163).

Murphy's study of the change during the first half of the nineteenth century in the pattern of Mundurucui marital residence from virilocal to uxorilocal as a means to effect surplus manioc production for trade with Brazilian frontiersmen (a task facilitated by an elaborate division of labor between women of a household) illustrates more fundamental changes in traditional structure (1956). Uxorilocal residence has also proved to be extremely adaptable for the Miskito of Nicaragua, not by providing for more efficient women's work groups, but by permitting men greater freedom to roam wherever jobs may be available without causing undue disruption to village identity and social solidarity. Whether uxorilocal residence is entirely post-contact is not clear in this case, although the historical record strongly indicates that settled village life has come about through missionary and trader efforts (Helms 1967: Chap. 1; n.d.).³

Pressures from missionaries and traders not only can result in more sedentary residential patterns, but may also influence the location of villages. The Munduruci', the Snowdrift Chipewyan and the Montagnais all responded to the lure and demands of commercial trade by dissolving older settlement patterns and regrouping into seemingly rather loosely integrated communities centering about trading posts. In so doing, the particular socioeconomic ties formed by individual nuclear families with the post, rather than traditional inter-familial kin ties per se, become the orienting factor in community membership (Murphy and Steward 1956:350; VanStone 1965:20, 74). However, Leacock interjects a cautionary note with respect to the interpretation of such moves as they apply to the traditionally mobile Montagnais, noting that "it would be wrong to infer from this that increasing dependence on trade has acted to destroy formerly stable social groups. The reverse seems to be closer to the truth-that the changes brought about by the fur trade have led to more stable bands with greater formal organization" (1954:20). An elected chief, a certain linguistic unity, band endogamy are a few of the

integrative features noted among western Montagnais groups "where dependence on the fur trade has been virtually complete for several decades" (ibid., cf. p. 22 and Leacock 1955:34).

The most extensive socio-political adaptation to economic pressures found within our sample of societies occurred with the Miskito. Analysis of ethnohistorical sources makes it clear that Miskito culture per se did not exist prior to European contact, but that the emergence of that socio-cultural pattern now identified as "Miskito" occurred directly as a result of contact with Western states. A detailed reconstruction of Miskito ethnohistory is available elsewhere (Helms 1967). Suffice to note here that prior to contact the coast appears to have been inhabited by a number of small, semi-nomadic groups practicing hunting, fishing, and limited agriculture. Analysis of the events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries makes it clear that contact with foreigners, specifically the attainment of firearms and exclusive trade privileges, gave one of these units, known now as Miskito, an identity and, more important, a political superiority which set it off from all other local groups. In succeeding decades the Miskito, armed with guns and backed by judicious encouragement from the British, were able to politically dominate the east coast of Honduras and Nicaragua and to extract from other indigenous peoples, through peaceful means or by force if necessary, various raw materials needed for trade with foreign merchants. Today the Miskito, now numbering in the tens of thousands, live in fairly permanent villages along the coast and lower courses of local rivers, speak a distinctive dialect, and maintain a definite sense of cultural unity and identity in the face of the outside world (Helms 1969a).⁴

Purchase Societies and Agrarian States

Purchase societies may be found not only in relation to industrializing states, but also on the economic fringes of agrarian states. The so-called "hill" or "tribal" peoples of the Southeast Asian highlands would seem to be a case in point, and will be used by way of example here, along with certain hunting and gathering groups of South Asia as discussed in a recent paper by Richard Fox (1969).

A number of authors have commented on the existence of economic ties between the hill peoples and adjacent valley groups, which are organized into lowland states. Lehman's emphasis on the economic adaptation of the Chin to Burman society was quoted previously. In like manner, Halpern comments on the relationships between the plains Lao and hill peoples to the north, noting that "all the groups inhabiting northern Indochina and neighboring areas [are] dependent to some extent on trade" (1964:122). He stresses further the importance of such connections for hill peoples by advancing the hypothesis that "for certain basic economic items plains villages may in many respects be more self-sufficient than hill areas" (1964: 122). A summary article by Leach (1961) suggests that outside commercial involvement has a considerable history among hill peoples generally. He notes that the highland regions lay in the path of ancient overland trade routes between China and India and that hill peoples traditionally were involved with

commercial dealings with China. Leach also indicates the absence of significant political control by valley states over hill peoples, a situation that Halpern notes too:

although economic integration and interdependence formal or informal, is an established fact, political integration does not seem to have really occurred up to the present day. Neither the Lao kingdoms nor the French colonial government ever really integrated the upland peoples into their government structures (1964:124).

Thus, both in terms of economic but not political ties with adjacent states, and in the need for foreign items as cultural necessities, the hill peoples of Southeast Asia would seem to present examples of purchase societies. Lehman appears to be of the same opinion, for he extends his "subnuclear society", as he terms the Chin, to also include "a whole series of mountain dwelling peoples in a region stretching from Assam across all of mainland Southeast Asia and into the tribal areas of Southwest China" (1963: 224).

For more detailed information we will draw on Lehman's monograph and on Izikowitz' account of the Lamet of northern Laos (1951). Lehman succinctly states the significance, indeed primacy, of ties with neighboring Burman civilization for the Chin, arguing that "the Chin social system shown is so largely molded in response to the problem of manipulating relationships with complex, nuclear, Burman society that we shall propose setting up a special class to accommodate it" (1963:1). The social system in question was based on patrilineal clans and lineages, which were ranked and stratified and organized into a number of regional political networks through marriage alliances among the Northern Chin. These alliances were formed to keep the peace, amass concentrations of wealth by trading and raiding on an organized basis, and thus obtain and circulate items of wealth essential to Northern Chin life (1963:152, 155). It is interesting to note, however, why the Southern Chin did not develop so complex a social system:

The difference between the elaborate social organization of the North and the simple one of the South is largely due to the fundamentally different way in which these two kinds of Chin were related by trade to plains Burman. The need for widespread organization to promote this trade was not present in the South where Chin communities on the east and west abutted directly upon plains regions of fairly dense Burman settlement. In the North the stimulus to local technological development seems to have been the more highly organized character of trade. This resulted in supralocal political systems with a consequent development of social stratification, which in turn stimulated importation and production of a wide range of luxury goods. Trade in the North required an elaborate social organization because it could not proceed smoothly by itself, owing to the uncertainty of Burman settlement in the ... valley (Lehman 1963:44).

The exact details of just how the supralocal political organizations of the Northern Chin effected their contacts with the outside and handled trade details is not known. The system seems to have been somewhat precariously based in that no single item was produced specifically for trade.

Rather, whatever local goods or services were available would serve as payment: maize husks, bees wax, stick lac and other jungle products, army service and coolie labor on public projects such as roads (both presumably voluntary). The wealth imported included both everyday items such as iron for tools, salt and weaving materials, and "luxury" goods-gongs, brass pots, silks, various metals for jewelry-required for formal prestations basic to the maintenance of the rank system (Lehman 1963:156, 166-69). In contrast with the Chin, the Lamet of northern Laos engaged in extensive cultivation of a specific major export, dry (mountain) rice, to obtain necessary foreign materials. Furthermore, rice cultivation was an activity of such importance that it consumed "the greatest part of their time and labor" (Izikowitz 1951:317). "The cultivation of rice decides the rhythm of the work of the year, and through its functions and in influencing all working life, the cultivation of rice affects the entire culture" (1951:358). Izikowitz also suggests that agriculture was probably less important before the introduction of iron tools, themselves a foreign item (1951:139, 336).

The exchange of rice with the Laotian world provides the Lamet with necessary day-to-day items such as pottery, iron tools, clothing, none of which they produce themselves, as well as with "luxury" items such as gongs, silk, and Chinese porcelains needed for ancestor worship and as bride price to effect good marriages.⁵ Wealth and good marriages are paths to higher social prestige, the ultimate goal of which is to attain for the head of the household the highly prestigious and politically significant (as arbitrator and go-between) position of *lem*. Items from the outside world, bought mainly with rice, are the means to achieve this goal (Izikowitz 1951: 116, 146, 297- 98, 302-5, 314-15).

Rice is produced by the Lamet through the cooperative labors of the household, composed of a patrilocal extended family which works as an economic unit in both production and consumption. Since the larger the family, the greater the production, many Lamet acquire a second wife in order to have more children, an extra pair of adult hands, and generally more efficient organization of work. In what may be an old practice, bachelors among the northern or Upper Lamet also emigrate to seek work in teak forests or on tobacco plantations of northern Thailand to acquire the wealth needed for social climbing (Izikowitz 1951: 75, 101-2, 108, 303-6, 347-48, 354).

In brief, among both Chin and Lamet, trade ties with wider economic systems are basic to the functioning of "native" society. In order to effect these ties and to obtain the desired material items, certain of the Chin have developed an elaborate socio-political hierarchy, while the Lamet have focussed on the cultivation of quantities of rice, meeting the demands such work entails by maintaining large family work units, and conforming to an annual work cycle of planting and harvest that absorbs the greatest part of their time and labor. In turn, foreign goods have become essential to the smooth function of the internal socio-political system whether it be in terms of maintaining a series of regional political systems through intermarried ranked lineages as among the Northern Chin, or of providing the avenue for attainment of the prestigious and politically necessary position of *lem* among the Lamet.

Similar processes also appear to have been at work in the adaptations made by so-called "tribes" of South Asia. In a stimulating paper Richard Fox suggests that far from being similar to genuinely aboriginal hunting and gathering societies in other parts of the world, such "tribal" peoples as the Kadar, Birhor, Chenchu, Vedda, and Nayadi "represent occupationally specialized productive units similar to caste groups such as Carpenters, Shepherds, or Leather Workers." The specialization in these cases involves the exchange of forest products "valued primarily for external barter or trade" for "necessary subsistence or ceremonial items-such as iron tools, rice, arrow-heads, etc. -[which] are only obtainable in this way . . . the Indian hunters-and-gatherers are highly specialized exploiters of a marginal terrain from which they supply the larger society with desirable, but otherwise unobtainable, forest items such as honey, wax, rope and twine, baskets, and monkey and deer meat . . . their economic process and well-being are dependent on the barter of these items for the crops and crafts of their more complexly organized plainsmen neighbors" (1969: 141-2).

Fox then proceeds to note that "the collection of forest products for external barter or exchange has various effects on the internal social organization of South Asian hunters-and-gatherers." In contrast to other foragers, the groups analyzed by Fox show the "single (nuclear) family as the prime economic unit . . . [an] equally prevalent pattern of highly migratory individuals, the lack of any formal kin pattern to the composition of settlements, and the lack of extensive reciprocity and sharing among family groups (a basic form of social cohesion among other primitive hunters and gatherers) . . ." (emphasis in original). All this, he feels, is "consonant with the fragmentation of the society into individually competitive economic units, each geared to external trade or exchange" (Fox 1969: 142).

Summary and Conclusions

It has been the contention of this paper that we can usefully delineate a socio-cultural category other than peasantry, formed as a result of contact between states and less complex societies. This cultural type is articulated with the outside world through particular economic ties in such a way that definitive adaptations to the larger system result. Unlike peasantry, purchase societies are not enmeshed in the political controls characteristic of agrarian states. Instead, they are found on the economic frontiers of both agrarian and industrializing states; in regions that lie beyond such controls. Consequently, their involvement with a wider society is characterized not by coercive demands by state powerholders for payment of various rents to the state, but solely by engagement in trade or wage labor to obtain items of foreign manufacture which have become cultural necessities for them. In order to participate successfully in this wider economic network, internal socio-political and economic structures may adapt in any number of ways so as to facilitate the formation of outside economic ties.

A paper of this nature cannot help but, indeed is intended to, raise more questions than it answers. Perhaps one of the most fundamental of these concerns is in what structural and functional ways the internal organization of purchase society as a social type contrasts with

peasantry. We have tried to suggest lines of contrast in the field of external relations, and pointed to various internal adaptations that have followed in particular cases, but little attempt was made to arrive at broad internal structural characteristics of purchase society on a scale general enough to contrast with other socio-cultural categories. Yet, given the difference in external ties, significant internal contrasts might well be expected. Investigations along these lines might prove fruitful indeed.

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Notes

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1 The term "state" is used in the sense employed by Fried (1967:Chap. 6).

2 In a recent synthesis of our understanding to date of the nature of peasant culture, George Foster stresses the point that the status of agriculturalist, although commonly found, is not the essential criteria for defining peasantry (1967:6). However, Wolf, in another attempt at summary and interpretation, does speak of peasants as rural cultivators, albeit with additional structural criteria also basic to the definition. (1966:2-4, 10). And, in fact, the vast majority of ethnographic accounts of peasant cultures deal with agriculturalists.

3 Village endogamy was clearly conditioning uxori-local residence in the Miskito village of Asang in 1965. However, as with the Mundurucfi, it is the solidarity of related females that is important, and this remains a crucial element in Asang at the present time in spite of greater endogamy (Helms 1967: Chap. 3).

4 Before leaving the topic of socio-political adaptations among purchase societies in relation to industrializing states the subject of associations may briefly be considered. Such groups may be viewed as organizations that aid in establishing a better "fit" between local conditions and the demands of the outside world, and might well be expected to occur, perhaps with considerable frequency, among purchase societies as one means to adjust to wider situations. Examination of the case studies used in this paper reveals a number of such associations, including mission

churches, village stores, and sports organizations. The Mundurucfi men's house can also be viewed in a comparable light (cf. Wolf 1964: 116-17).

5 Izikowitz notes, however, that "the purchase of bronze drums, gongs and articles of luxury is a thing that occurs relatively seldom nowadays . . .most of these articles that are in existence are old inherited things" (1951:314).